

And You Askance Reply: Three Programs of Double Bass Music

by

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**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Musical Arts
(Music: Performance)
in the University of Michigan
2017**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank my committee, Professors Aaron, André, Garrett, Holland, and especially my teacher and mentor, Professor Gannett, for their guidance, wisdom, humor, and interest in my wild musical fantasies.

My parents, Ed and Maria McDevitt, for their unending support and flights to Michigan.

My partner, Brien, whose love and encouragement helped give me the strength to realize my capabilities.

I want to also acknowledge my studio mates this last year - Maggie, Kai, Jacob, Pablo, Lauren, Marlo - who helped me play and talk through everything I wanted to do and created a safe and challenging learning environment.

Betsy, whose wisdom and advice got me through this degree.

All of my collaborators (in no particular order) Paula, Chloe, Chris, Janet, Betsy, Jon, Ben, Chelsea, Naki, Brien, Brandon, Rex, Carolina, and Mike were amazing at what they did, kind with their time, and indispensable to the result of these projects.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
ABSTRACT	iv
RECITAL 1	1
Recital 1 Program	1
Recital 1 Program Notes	2
RECITAL 2	7
Recital 2 Program	7
Recital 2 Program Notes	8
RECITAL 3	15
Recital 3 Program	15
Recital 3 Program Notes	17
Recital 3 Poems	24

ABSTRACT

The programming of each of these recitals is unified not around a region or genre, but around a theme of artistry in connection to community. *Open Space* sought to disrupt the routine of the recital with a “moving” stage, multi-media, and artist collaborations. *History Repeats* engaged with the past while encouraging emerging composers to write for the bass, premiering four new works. *To Own a Body* is a feminist exploration of performance, unified by poetry dealing with women’s experiences of and within their own bodies. I sought to make expression, collaboration, and communication the focuses of these performances, elements I have often felt were missing from concerts of Western art music, and particularly music school recitals.

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM

Open Space: First Dissertation Recital

October 29, 2016

Megan McDevitt, double bass

Hankinson Rehearsal Hall, University of Michigan

Incantation pour Junon for double bass and piano (1992)

Rabbath, François
arr. Megan McDevitt
(b. 1931)

Jonathan Hammonds, Betsy Soukup, Ben Willis, double bass drone

Figment III for solo bass (2007)

Carter, Elliot
(1908-2012)

bonewater for bass quartet (2015)

Willis, Ben
(b. 1988)

Jonathan Hammonds, Betsy Soukup, Ben Willis, double bass

— *Intermission* —

Ciel Étoilé for percussion in double bass (1999)

Saariaho, Kaija
(b. 1952)

Chelsea Tinsler Jones, percussion

Esplorazione del Bianco I for solo bass (1986)

Sciarrino, Salvatore
(b. 1947)

Chris Reilly, visuals

On the raw and the cooked, for bass and electronics (2016)

McDevitt, Megan
(b. 1985)

Paula Modafferri, dance

Concert Duo, movement 1 (1999)

Meyer, Edgar
(b. 1960)

Janet Lyu, violin

RECITAL 1 PROGRAM NOTES

Open Space: First Dissertation Recital

This recital is all about exploration, experimentation, and connection. In order to grow as artists, observers, and human beings, we must disrupt the comfort of routine and allow ourselves to be vulnerable. Human connection and a willingness to question the routine and mundane can lead us to new ideas, deeper understanding, and any number of unknown possibilities. But it is the act of breaking from the comfortable and familiar that holds the most importance, not the results.

In the study of many of the arts, innovation, originality, and the pushing of boundaries are celebrated and promoted. Music school can be quite different. While there are opportunities for creativity and collaboration, much of the curriculum is dedicated to repeated performances of the great masterworks and “conserving” (containing a shared root with “conservatory”) the Western Art Music tradition. In a typical performance of classical music, the audience sits quietly in chairs, facing the stage, in a manner that encourages reverence. This format, and other rituals of the classical music recital, provide a “frame” for concert music.¹ They show us where each work begins and ends and tell us what is socially acceptable to do about it. We get used to this as concert attendees. While I am not suggesting we dispense with these rituals entirely, bringing awareness to this (now mostly engrained) “frame” and challenging it can provide listeners with the opportunity to experience the concert differently. Since the goal of this performance is to communicate and connect, I am inviting audience members to sit or stand comfortably, and face any direction they like, in order to remove some of the constraints of the “frame” of the classical recital. To seek exploration and expansion in my own artistry, I chose to collaborate with interesting performers and artists, perform works that challenge me as a performer and artist, and to present them in a format that allows for the fluidity of the barrier between stage and audience, giving listeners the space to experience the performance with a renewed awareness.

Suggestions for ways to listen: while watching the producer of sound, while engaging visually with another aspect of the performance, with eyes closed, facing away, while thinking about the music, while thinking about love, while thinking about your groceries, while thinking about nothing, or nothingness.

Incantation pour Junon, François Rabbath

François Rabbath is unique among bassists and composers. Born in Aleppo, Syria as one of nine children, he was entirely self-taught in his early years. According to his biography,² after moving

¹ Alexis Paterson, “Sound Barriers: The Framing Functions of Noise and Silence,” in *Resonances: Noise and Contemporary Music*, edited by Michael Goddard, Benjamin Halligan, and Nicola Spelman, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), 198-208.

² Frank Proto, libenmusic.com, “Francois Rabbath,” Liben Music Publishers, <https://www.liben.com/FRBio.html>.

to Beirut as a child, he used Eduard Nanny's method book and a bass his brother brought home to teach himself enough to excel in his Paris Conservatoire audition within 3 days of getting the music for the required pieces. Since then he has distinguished himself as a virtuoso, purveyor of his original sound and improvisatory style, and founder of a method of bass pedagogy.

Incantation pour Junon is one of my favorite works for bass. It lends itself to a beautiful landscape through its ambiguous metric configuration and minor pentatonic scale. I chose to perform this with a low drone of basses instead of with piano because it furthers the atmospheric, rhythmically unconstrained energy and allows for the audience to be enveloped on all sides by warm sound. It is a welcoming embrace to begin the evening.

Figment III, Elliott Carter

Elliott Carter is the only composer on the program who is no longer living. He lived to the ripe-old age of 103, and never ceased writing music. At 98 he composed *Figment III* for Don Palma of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. The *Figments* are a series of five pieces for solo instruments, the first two of which were written for solo cello, the fourth for viola, and the fifth for marimba. They explore modernist atonality with an emphasis on hexachords and their permutations. The rhythmic content is distinctly Carter-esque in its obscuring of the quarter-note pulse via extended sequences of long notes with odd numbers of sixteenth-note or (in the case of *Figment III*, mostly) triplet durations. His later works are typified by dialogue, often in opposition, between voices. This is usually achieved through the use of different instruments, but opposition, antagonism, and dialogue are still present in his solo works. For Carter, the types of conversations that “a single character could have in a solo work represents the stream of consciousness that is inherent to the human mind.”³ Carter dedicated the previous installment, *Figment II* for solo cello, to Charles Ives, specifically evoking the *Concord Sonata* and *Hallowe'en* through “fragmentary bits.”⁴ It is unclear if such an influence exists for this work in the series, but the title suggests a not-quite-concrete relic of the past or of one's own imagination. Getting these characters across is an important component of performer-audience connection. When listening, I encourage you to think of multiple imaginary characters interrupting one another and attempting to be heard, as if you were listening to the inner-workings of your own mind.

bonewater, for four double basses, Ben Willis

Ben Willis is an incredible bassist, composer, and improviser. He performs experimental and improvised music regularly, often collaborating with movement and multimedia artists.⁵ Ben first wrote this piece a year ago for a premiere in Detroit, but we were derailed by a November snow storm. We finally premiered it October 15, 2016 at Trinosophes. When he, Betsy Soukup, and

³ David Schiff and Mark D. Porcaro, “Carter, Elliott” (New Jan. 30, 2014), *Grove Music Online*.

⁴ Elliott Carter, “Figment II: Remembering Mr. Ives” elliottcarter.com (website), *Amphion Foundation*, <https://www.elliottcarter.com/compositions/figment-ii-remembering-mr-ives>.

⁵ benwillis.us

Jon Hammonds play with me, I trust them entirely. Working with them embodies the spirit of this recital. Through our musical connection, I am pushed to discover, expand, and grow. This piece contains both determined and indeterminate elements that results in a disturbing and beautiful adventure into the imagination of Ben Willis. The following is a description of *bonewater* from the composer.

by regulating her breath, she was able to control the speed of her heartbeat, bring it back down to an inaudible rustle. her body was made of grass, and the early morning blue sky saturated the water in the air. two tracks cut through the field, freshly crushed, straight as day. a strip of her skin clung to the fence behind her, caught in a gross miscalculation, dripping.

Ciel Étoilé, Kaija Saariaho

Saariaho is a Finnish composer immersed in multiple influences. She has moved through compositional techniques of tonality and atonality, serialism, and spectralism.⁶ Her training is in Western art music, but she also counts Indian classical music and Japanese music as influences. Like the spectralists, Saariaho's focus is on tone color, not simply as an ornament, but as an essential structural component.⁷ *Ciel Étoilé* embodies this philosophy. Saariaho writes that each of these measures is "a 'star': a unique sound object," emphasizing the importance of the independence of the sound qualities from one another. This piece requires patience and concentration, both from the performers and from the listeners. Through these collective acts, we come together, percussionist and bassist, audience and performers, "as in a ritual." Saariaho's music is precious to me. Her explorations of timbre and her emphasis on quality of sound over form or harmony have expanded my ears and my musical focus.

Esplorazione del Bianco I, Salvatore Sciarrino

"First quietness. Then sound, like the breath of the silence."

-Salvatore Sciarrino

Esplorazione del Bianco I was the first work I chose for this program. Sciarrino's music speaks to me in a profound way. Rather than opt for a typical melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic structuring of art music, Sciarrino relishes silence. For Sciarrino, like white is a combination of all of the colors, silence "is not the absence of sound, but instead fullness of every sonorous possibility".⁸ Sciarrino believes that the space in his music allows the listener's thoughts to be part of the piece. It creates a tension that forces the listener to be present with her/himself. Essentially, "exploration of white" is the act of discovering sonic potential. I have extended that in this performance to include performance potential and personal and emotional exploration.

⁶ Pirkko Moisala, *Kaija Saariaho* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 73.

⁷ Kimmo Korhonen and Risto Nieminen, "Saariaho, Kaija" (Updated Jan 31, 2002), *Grove Music Online*.

⁸ Pietro Misuraca, "Salvatore Sciarrino: The Alchemist Composer," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Musicology* 12 (2012): 78.

Sciarrino was largely self-taught in his early development as a composer, and dedicated much of his early years to painting as well. He was born in Palermo, but soon moved to “firma terra” in Rome, eventually retiring to Umbria. Sciarrino’s contribution to the world of music was to find form and expression through what he calls “figures”: articulatory blocks of sound, arranged in “windows form.” This form is an attempt to mimic the intermittence of the human mind and is related to the realm of technology, wherein “parallel dimensions” can co-exist and mutually interrupt, as “windows” on a computer. Sciarrino is mostly concerned with “ghosts and shades of sounds”⁹ and the emergence out of and return to silence through the accumulation and rarefaction of sonic events. For Sciarrino, sound cannot be divorced from its components (timbre, volume, pitch, quality).

The visuals for *Esplorazione del Bianco I* are the result of a collaboration with visual artist Chris Reilly. The mesmerizing pattern is performed in real-time as a visual instrument, highlighting the themes of silence and contemplation in the accompanying sonic score.

***On the raw and the cooked*, Megan McDevitt**

The ultimate exploration and revealer of vulnerability is to make and perform my own work. Through my friends’ and colleagues’ investment in the practice of improvisation, I was inspired to explore this on my own terms. *On the raw and the cooked* originated when I took a class in Performing Arts Technology and began working in Max/MSP. The idea of mixing electronically generated or manipulated (“cooked”) sound with acoustic (“raw”) sound felt like something profound. The drone has manually adjusted subtle timbral shifts, and the bass emerges from its sound. The delay signal lends the opportunity to explore, play, and reflect. Once Paula Modafferi signed on to the project, the piece really took shape. *On the raw and the cooked* encapsulates the themes of this recital: exploration, experimentation, and human connection.

Concert duo, movement i, Edgar Meyer

Edgar Meyer is a virtuosic bassist and genre-bending composer. As the son of a bassist, he began playing at the age of five. His works are primarily a mix of American folk, bluegrass, and classical music, with the grit and unrelenting groove for the former two, and the technical difficulty and formal influence of the latter. The full Concert Duo consists of four movements and prequel, but the only publicly available music from the suite is the first movement. Meyer claims to get inspiration for his works from his various (and heavy-hitting) collaborators. By blending and crossing genre boundaries, he forces the audience to pay attention in a way they might not if he were playing standard repertoire. I have never played a chamber piece so exciting or technically challenging, which pushed me to stretch myself to the limits of my abilities (particularly in terms of speed). It is also a perfect counterbalance to the deeper, thoughtful programming of the rest of the evening. We are capping the night off with a ho-down!

⁹ Ibid., 74.

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RECITAL 2 PROGRAM

History Repeats: Second Dissertation Recital
February 10, 2017
Megan McDevitt, double bass
Stamps Auditorium, University of Michigan

Naki Kripfgans, piano
Chelsea Tinsler, vibraphone

Vocalise, op. 34, no. 14 (1915) Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873-1943)

Naki Kripfgans, piano

O Come, Let Us Worship for double bass and piano (2016) (World Premiere) Rex Isenberg
(b. 1987)

Naki Kripfgans, piano

Painting Rain for double bass, vibraphone, and piano (2016) (WP) Brandon Scott Rumsey
(b. 1987)

Naki Kripfgans, piano
Chelsea Tinsler Jones, vibraphone

Drei Romanzen for violin and piano, op. 22 (1853) Clara Schumann
(1819-1896)

Naki Kripfgans, piano

— *Intermission* —

Confession for double bass and piano (2016) (WP) Brien Henderson
(b. 1977)

Parable XVII for solo double bass, op. 131 (1974) Vincent Persichetti
(1915-1987)

Cello Suite no. 2 in D minor, Prelude, BWV 1008 (1717-23) Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Reflecciones, for double bass and electronics (2016) (WP) Carolina Heredia
(b. 1981)

RECITAL 2 PROGRAM NOTES

History Repeats: Second Dissertation Recital

At this moment in history, as our divisions consume us and our values are tested, it can be valuable to look to the past for guidance in the present. When I first designed this program and commissioned these new works about a year ago, I thought of it as an interesting experiment in the individual ways artists interface with works from the past. But my perspective on the environment, specifically the country, we inhabit has shifted significantly in the last year, and this program has taken on a deeper meaning.

As an interpretive performer and bassist, my motivation for commissioning new works for the bass was threefold: to expand the repertoire of the instrument, to allow myself the challenge of bringing a new piece to life, and to support and encourage emerging composers. For this recital I paired already-composed works from various eras of music (only one originally composed for bass) that had some personal meaning for me, with new works by four emerging composers. Each composer was assigned one of the existing works to program alongside their new original piece. The older work is meant to inspire, in some way (musically, thematically, extra-musically, etc.), the new work. The composers chose the parameters for themselves; the only prompt from me was the programming.

The bass is an instrument that is often regarded as accompanimental. For centuries, its primary role has been as harmonic support to the more melodic parts of higher instruments. This is an incredibly important role, but it is limiting. In the twentieth century, the range and adeptness of abilities of bassists began to increase (with a few historical outliers, including Giovanni Bottesini and Serge Koussevitzky), and along with this evolution, more versatile music began to be written. As soloists and chamber musicians, however, bassists are still operating on a deficit of repertoire in comparison with other instrumentalists. It is important to the continued evolution of the instrument to encourage the composition of new solo and chamber works.

The aspect of performance preparation that engages me the most is that moment after I have deciphered the technical specifications, particularly in a new piece, when the music begins to emerge. After laboring over technique, I can finally hear the way the sounds fit together on my instrument. This cohesiveness leads to storytelling and emotional expression. This process takes longer, but is more satisfying in pieces that have not been widely performed. When performing new works, the option is left for me to find my own interpretation, rather than rely on countless recordings and previous performance practice. If I can communicate and collaborate with the composer, it is even more rewarding.

I firmly believe in the importance of encouraging composers just beginning their professional careers. All of the composers I have chosen for this recital—Carolina Heredia, Brandon Scott Rumsey, Brien Henderson, and Rex Isenberg—are completing doctoral studies in composition and/or are working as professional composers. It is important to me to give composers at this stage in their careers the opportunity to collaborate with a performer who is wholly invested in their process. The result was that I got four incredible pieces for either solo bass or chamber ensemble, that are each extremely different from one another and reflect the styles and values of each of the contemporary composers. The combination of the distinct styles

of each commissioned composer with those of the classic works resulted in a program of incredible variety.

My relationship to the political climate we are in is fraught. I am finding my values at odds with those in power and feel more urgency to find my voice through artistic expression. In a context where compassion, love, and an appeal to our common humanity are pushed aside in favor of fear and might, this performance has become one of a connection to the past as a way to move forward into the future, and finding commonality while celebrating our differences.

In preparing each new work for performance, I was confronted with the notion that as artists we all come from different backgrounds and perspectives, and yet are able to collaborate and communicate through our common medium. We use our similarities to communicate our differences, our individual perspectives, and our distinct goals. This relationship works across time, from masters of the past and into our uncertain future.

The order of the program is not intuitive. The Rachmaninoff leads well into the Isenberg. I will be playing the Rumsey before its pair, the Clara Wieck Schumann pieces because it is meant to act as an interlude. The second half begins with the Henderson, which feels to me like a contemplative opener, then settling into the more active, and at times violent, Persichetti. There will be no break between the Bach and the Heredia, as the Heredia is meant to emerge directly from the Prelude.

Vocalise Op. 34, No. 14, Rachmaninoff

Rachmaninoff's *Vocalise* has an interesting relationship to the double bass. While widely known as a vocal song without words, it was written and premiered separately from the other 13 songs in its set. Serge Koussevitzky, a contemporary of Rachmaninoff's, known for his conducting and as one of the lead proponents of double bass solo repertoire, played a preview performance of this piece in December 1915 on double bass with orchestra.¹⁰ The actual premiere took place in January 1916 with soprano Antonina Nezhdanova singing the solo and Koussevitzky conducting. The context of the double bass performance is unknown, but Koussevitzky refers to it as his own arrangement.¹¹ The piece has been arranged for virtually every instrument, and is played and sung often. It evokes for me a sense of nostalgia, perhaps tinged with regret. This relationship with the past allows it to fit well as the opener of this concert. We start with a memory of the past. I chose this piece for Rex because of the romantic beauty present within his work, even as he deconstructs and rebuilds its elements. I also know of his love of Eastern European music from the turn of the century.

O Come Let Us Worship, Rex Isenberg

From the composer:

¹⁰ Victor Yuzefovich, *Rachmaninov and Koussevitzky*, Presentation at Northwestern University, Evanston, IL (May 4, 2011).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

O Come, Let Us Worship (2016) is inspired by Sergei Rachmaninoff's All-Night Vigil (Op. 37), the composer's Russian Orthodox choral masterpiece. This work for bass and piano aims to reflect the experience of spiritual transcendence through listening to a piece such as Rachmaninoff's choral work during worship. It begins with the opening music of the first movement of the All-Night Vigil, which gradually disintegrates and fades away, as though the mind is wandering and the soul is being transported. Eventually the original Rachmaninoff disappears completely, as the mind reaches its deepest moment of contemplation, expressed through a long solo passage in the double bass. As the soul returns to the body, the elements of the original choral work slowly piece themselves together until the finale of Rachmaninoff's chorus triumphantly returns at the end.

Painting Rain, Brandon Scott Rumsey

From the composer:

For this wonderful collaborative project, Megan asked me to respond in some way to the *Drei Romanzen* by Clara Schumann and to write a piece that would also be played on the high bass. While much of the Schumann work has a quick harmonic tempo, one can always hear the clarity that she achieves by maintaining long spun-out phrases and a delicate texture. I was, as usual, captivated by the complex swirls of gestures by using these simple (in terms of texture... not difficulty!) ingredients. To play on this personal interpretation, I have treated the parts in *Painting Rain* similarly—each member of the trio plays a different character, but together they sing as equals. Ideally, as with the Schumann, you could listen to this short piece a few times and hear something new to the ear each time, despite its repetitive nature.

This project found me amidst a creative stage in which I have been exploring nostalgic melodies and harmonies as well as repetitive figures (micro-“ear worms”) that seem to spiral around and around in my mind for days until I do something with them. Thus, this piece contains a great deal of motivic variation within two contrasting musical textures that use similarly-flavored, slow moving harmonies within each formal area.

Finally, I think of *Painting Rain* as a stand-alone interlude. The Interlude as a genre is not too common as it is more typical for compositions to be conceived as a Prelude, Finale, or the “main event,” many of which intend to make an impressive statement. *Painting Rain*, by contrast, serves as a palette-cleanser, reset button, or “coffee break,” and could be programmed before or after a demanding piece that showcases compositional or soloistic virtuosity.

Drei Romanzen, Clara Wieck Schumann

Clara Wieck was born in 1819 in Leipzig to two musician parents. She came to be an incredibly accomplished pianist in her day, touring across Europe as a teenager. It was at that time that she met Robert Schumann, and when they fell in love, her father disapproved of her marriage. The laws of the time required a father's consent for a marriage to his daughter, and so she fought him in court, eventually marrying Robert at the age of 21 in 1840. They went on to collaborate musically, both writing and performing, and to have eight children. When his mental illness began to take hold and he attempted suicide in 1854, she was not allowed to see him for his entire hospitalization, for two years, until days before his death in 1856. After his death, she

continued touring and carrying on his legacy while earning money to care for her children. She lived to the age of 76.¹²

Clara Wieck Schumann's life is marked by "musical triumph and personal tragedy."¹³ Four of her children died in her lifetime. She ostensibly stopped composing after Robert Schumann's death, though she continued to perform and teach, dazzling audiences not only with her skill and musicality, but also her skill as an improviser. It is unfair to judge Clara Schumann's successes and failures by today's standards. Often biographies of great women are marked by a lament for what could have been "if only" the restrictions of gender were not present. It is unlikely that Schumann viewed herself this way, and her legacy is continually being reinvestigated.

These three pieces, as a set, were written in 1853, the year before Robert Schumann's suicide attempt. They are dedicated to a close violinist friend of the Schumanns, Joseph Joachim. They received favorable reviews, and reportedly, Joachim was very fond of playing them. Interestingly, two of the *Romanzen* were also arranged for cello and performed by Alfred Piatti in 1856 (there is no existing written score of these arrangements).¹⁴

In order to make this work as comfortable as possible for the bass, as well as to keep the piano part from sounding too low and muddy, I decided to play the set in "high C" tuning. This means I used a bass that had been strung a perfect fourth up from that of an orchestrally tuned bass, with the highest string sounding at an octave below middle C, followed by a G, D, and A, descending. To accomplish this, I had to transpose the bass part down a fourth so I would read it in orchestra tuning, and it would sound a fourth higher. This allowed it to be in the same key as the original, though an octave lower. The piano part is the same. I have long been interested in the music of Clara Schumann, as an example of a woman composer who gained some recognition relatively early on in modern times. I like to think of the relationship between the violin (or bass) voice and the piano voice as a romantic relationship where the violin is a free spirit and the piano is grounding. The piano works hard to keep the violin able to float free without spinning out of control. It is possible that Clara Wieck Schumann, as a pianist, saw herself in this role in her relationship to Robert and their children. Though that is a purely speculative observation, I find it helps give me a way to relate to the music on a deeper level.

Brandon's music is characterized by beautiful gestures and sweet harmonies that are just a bit different from what you might expect. He is interested in women composers and I knew he would treat the Clara Schumann piece with the utmost reverence. The resulting piece is a gorgeous, undulating texture with the piano and vibraphone propping up the bass in a manner similar to to *Drei Romanzen*, though the voices are more equal in many moments and the bass sound is more geared toward an actual bass than a violin. It has been a thrill to work on it with Brandon.

¹² Nancy B. Reich, "Schumann, Clara Wieck" (rev. February 23, 2011), *Grove Music Online*.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Nancy B. Reich, *Clara Schumann: The Artist and the Woman*, rev. ed., (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 315.

Confession, Brien Henderson

From the composer:

Persichetti's *Parable* for double bass develops out of a germinal statement. It is very brief and by the time he begins to develop upon it, only a few seconds into the piece, one doesn't even realize that the piece is already developing. This germ holds within it the potential of the big bang. As such, the piece develops so rapidly and to such vast degree that it seems Persichetti's desire was to create a whole world in only eight minutes.

Persichetti and I share a few concerns. Both his *Parable* and my *Confession* are members of a series. Persichetti wrote 25 *Parables*, mostly for soloists. I have, so far, written two *Confessions*, including this one. *Confession* is also founded on a germinal statement, but rather than an atomic element such as Persichetti's, mine is a fully realized being, a chant that initiates the piece. My approach to development is informed by the Renaissance cantus firmus technique, meaning the chant you hear at the beginning serves as the literal underpinning (the cantus firmus) for the remainder of the entire piece, though you might not hear it. The tones of the chant are shifted up or down, and their time-lengths are stretched beyond recognition. I also add new material above, sometimes below, the now-unrecognizable cantus firmus and reiterate fragments from the original chant.

In Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, the namesake of my series, he confesses his life to God, but also he relentlessly cites from scripture. It is both a very personal work and a neurotically well-researched one. My aim is to engage in a similar project of invention which flows from citation; this is the primary service of the cantus firmus.

So, while Persichetti attempts to create his world, I attempt to ponder the world I have created.

Parable XVII for double bass, Vincent Persichetti

"I'm avoiding a truth in order to make a point."¹⁵

Vincent Persichetti (1915-1987) was somewhat elusive when referring to his parables for various solo instruments (and sometimes ensembles). He believes that music stands on its own and does not refer to extramusical sources, but he is using the idea of reference within music to develop an entire piece of music out of a small figure at the beginning. The *Parables* are a set of pieces that all contain an opening motivic idea that morphs and expands and contracts. One dichotomy often employed in Persichetti's music is that of "graceful" vs. "gritty."¹⁶ These descriptions certainly apply to the *Parable* for double bass, with movement from the large graceful sections to large gritty sections, and sometimes containing short moments of grace or grit within the other's section. Though Persichetti might object to this interpretation, I love this piece because I can hear a story unfold, with a narrator beginning, ending, and appearing occasionally within the story to make sure we are paying attention. My original intention in giving this piece to Brien for his program pairing was to have the two works that were both a part of a series (Brien's *Confession*

¹⁵ Bruce Duffie, "Interview with Vincent Persichetti," November 15, 1986 (posted 2009, rev. 2014) www.bruceduffie.com/persichetti.

¹⁶ Walter G. Simmons, "Persichetti, Vincent," *Grove Music Online*.

series idea was beginning to develop). The result is that I will be performing two beautiful solo works, both involving reference to an original idea.

This work was originally written for Bertram Turetzky, though Persichetti himself also played bass at one point in his life. Originally from Philadelphia, he taught at Juilliard for most of his career and is considered a leading thinker, teacher, and composer in the realm of twentieth century music.

Prelude to Cello Suite No. 2, J.S. Bach

At the time Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) wrote the six suites for solo cello, he was living in Cöthen working exclusively for the court of Prince Leopold. Before taking this job, he had been living in Weimar where he was employed by both the court and the church.¹⁷ This move to Cöthen sparked an emphasis on secular music. He wrote the suites for cello as well as the sonatas and partitas for solo violin during this time, probably spurred by talented court musicians who had also been employed by Leopold. There is no original manuscript with Bach's autograph, so many early editions have been used to influence common performance practice today.

The cello suites have a particular way of creating a feeling of thoughtful reflection. A single voice generates a texture that creates a polyphony. It is not only masterful on the part of the composer, but gives the listener a sense of an internal dialogue — one person struggling with or reflecting upon him/herself. The prelude, one of the movements that evokes these feelings particularly poignantly, seemed the perfect choice to pair with a piece by Carolina, who beautifully blends acoustic and electronic sounds in her work to create an even more immersive reflective soundscape.

Reflecciones, Carolina Heredia

From the composer:

Exploring and revisiting the past is essential to me to better understand the present. In music, we define ourselves in opposition to or continuation of the tradition. When I was contacted by bassist Megan McDevitt and commissioned this work with the request of writing something that parallels the 2nd Bach Cello Suite in any aspect, I felt both challenged to pair my piece to one of such a great composer, but at the same time very excited because I feel very fondly of Bach as I have explored and performed much of his repertoire for violin in my earlier years as a violinist. I always admired the perfect combination of craft, artistry, and sensibility of his music and maybe that is also why Bach always affected me on a deep emotional level. In my piece "Reflections" I reflect on Bach's Cello Suite, but as many reflections this one is distorted, filtered through the lenses of my own being and life experiences. I played with many of the essential elements of Bach's music such as some of the harmonic progressions, the polyphonic melodies, sequential phrases, processes of augmentation and diminution and added some elements of my own, such as noise and electronically processed sounds.

¹⁷ Christoff Wolf, "Bach, Johann Sebastian," *Grove Music Online*.

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RECITAL 3 PROGRAM

To Own a Body: Third Dissertation Recital
April 21, 2017
Megan McDevitt, double bass
Riverside Arts Center, Dance Studio, Ypsilanti, MI

Ondas (Waves) for solo bass (1994) Ray, Sonia
(b. 1963)

Eight Etudes for the Double Bass (1974/2005) Gubaidulina, Sofia
Espressivo - sotto voce (b. 1931)
Paula Modafferi and Chloe Gonzales, dancers

Folia for double bass and electronics (1994) Saariaho, Kaija
(b. 1952)
Mike Perlman, live electronics

Eight Etudes for the Double Bass (1974/2005) Gubaidulina, Sofia
Senza arco (b. 1931)
Paula Modafferi and Chloe Gonzales, dancers

Boundaries for double bass duo (2017) (World Premiere) Soukup, Betsy
(b. 1986)
Betsy Soukup, double bass

Eight Etudes for the Double Bass (1974/2005) Gubaidulina, Sofia
Al taco - da punta d'arco (b. 1931)
Paula Modafferi and Chloe Gonzales, dancers

Maknongan for low instrument or bass voice (1976) Scelsi, Giacinto
(1905-1988)

Eight Etudes for the Double Bass (1974/2005) Gubaidulina, Sofia
Ricochet (b. 1931)
Paula Modafferi and Chloe Gonzales, dancers

Artemis in the Oak Grove for double bass and piano (2013)

Premo, Evan
(b. 1985)

Naki Kripfgans, piano

RECITAL 3 PROGRAM NOTES

To Own a Body: Third Dissertation Recital

“Gender is a system of metaphors about the power relationships between and among certain kinds of bodies.”¹⁸ Women’s bodies have been marginalized, controlled, fetishized, and oppressed both overtly and covertly for centuries. Living in, and owning, a body and/or gender identity that is susceptible to domination or marginalization by others comes with challenges, frustrations, and social counter-pressures. The urge to subvert physical and metaphysical domination and wanting to get along with people are often at odds because of the primacy of gender and its power dynamics as a mode of social categorization.

Feminist scholars often discuss gender as made up of performances, or “something you do” (as opposed to “something you are”). We are constantly performing our gender for ourselves, among others, and through institutions. We use gender regularly in metaphors as well. One prominent one that became popular in the Enlightenment and persists today is that of the mind-body divide. The mind is thought to be “rational” and masculine” while the body is “emotional” and “feminine.” Musicologists Suzanne Cusick and Fred Maus have discussed this concept as it relates to music theory. Maus contends that in order to avoid femininity, men (and any scholar who wishes to participate in the institution of music theory) who listen to and analyze music, must remain in the realm of rationality, and not engage with their emotional reactions to music (which, for many of us, is the whole point!).¹⁹ This leaves out, in music scholarship, everything but the formal elements. Cusick argues that analysis of music is often thought to be a mind-to-mind communication, which excludes the performance and the performer, or the *body* doing the performance. She asserts that like gender, music is “something you do.” According to her “we have changed an art that exists only when, so to speak, the Word is made Flesh, into an art which is only the Word. Metaphorically, we have denied the very thing that makes music music, the thing which gives it such enormous symbolic and sensual power.”²⁰

In second-wave feminism, two overarching priorities were made. One was that women should be able to do the same work as men. The other is that traditionally women’s work should be elevated in general appreciation. It seems most of the work has been done on the former, and less on the latter. One traditionally feminine trait is that of collaboration. In music, as in other arts, we often have the (male) “genius” author whose work is thought to be sacred. Some of the works on this recital came about through a more collaborative practice.

This performance, the final one of my doctoral degree, is meant to embrace the body in music, as well as express the experiences of women in and through their own bodies. The poetry and music come from a variety of generations, cultural perspectives, and gender identities. I

¹⁸ Suzanne. G. Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem,” in *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 18.

¹⁹ Fred Everett Maus, “Masculine Discourse in Music Theory,” in *Perspectives of New Music* 31, no. 2 (Summer, 1993).

²⁰ Cusick, 16.

wanted to present a variety of perspectives both through the voices of the artists (the poets and composers) and filtered through my artistic voice. Mostly, I chose poems and pieces of music that spoke to me in some way, whether through shared experience or an urge to understand that of others’.

The content of this recital includes mentions or allusions to suicide and sexual assault. Please keep that in mind before engaging with this performance; it may not be suitable for everyone.

Ondas (Waves) (1994), Sonia Ray

Sonia Ray is a double bassist, researcher and professor at the School of Music of the Federal University of Goiás (Brazil) where she teaches double bass, chamber music, methodology of research in music, and analysis and criticism of contemporary music. She has a doctoral degree in Double Bass Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Iowa, where she studied with international soloist Diana Gannett. Ray has performed as a soloist and as a chamber musician in several Brazilian and North American cities. She is an advocate for new music for the bass as has premiered and commissioned several Brazilian new works for the instrument. Ray is a co-founding member of the ABC-Brazilian Society of Bassists, through which she has idealized and co-organized six international double bass encounters, two double bass composition contests and a solo competition. She has appeared as a presenter at the ISB - International Society of Bassists since 1997 teaching the Young Bassists as well as performing.²¹

Dr. Gannett introduced me to Sonia Ray’s music this year. The idea of “waves” generates the feeling of bodily motion. One can imagine floating in the ocean, weightless and at the mercy of the sea. This sense of surrender and push and pull spoke to me in a physical way.

From the composer:

Ondas 1993 (Ricordi, 1994) - "Waves" won third prize in the IX Ritmo e Som Competition, UNESP/1991. The work explores artificial harmonics, double stops and pizzicato combined with several meter changes to create a constant atmosphere of tension and relaxation, like waves. It is atonal and has a section without tempo marking which is open to the performer’s interpretation.

Eight Etudes for the Double Bass, Sofia Gubaidulina (1974/2005)

Gubaidulina’s music often contains polar opposites interacting with one another. She attributes this to some extent to her upbringing. Her father was Tatar and her mother Slavic, and her music school director, whom she considered a father-figure, was Jewish. She also claims her

²¹ Sonia Ray, “Profile,” (website), <http://www.soniaray.com.br> (accessed April 12, 2017).

spiritual upbringing is German in origin.²² These polar opposites, particularly in these etudes, often have not only musical expressiveness, but physical as well. According to music theorist Michael Berry, Gubaidulina is “one of many composers whose music features and increased attention to the body.”²³ This conscious inclusion of the performer in the writing of the music, as Suzanne Cusick argues, can be a way to allow the “feminine” into the discussion and scholarship of music.

One other important element of Gubaidulina’s music is the inclusion of Fibonacci numbers and related sequences. All of these etudes find their climaxes using the Golden Ratio, and the Ricochet movement includes only Lucas numbers, a derivation of the Fibonacci sequence. Each ricochet contains 3, 4, 7, or 11 bounces, all Lucas numbers.

The pieces were written originally for cello in 1974 for Grigori Pekker, who rejected them. In 1977, Vladimir Tonkha performed them, suggesting they be renamed “Preludes” rather than “Etudes.”²⁴ In 2009, Gubaidulina adapted eight of the original ten for the bass, dedicating them to Alexander Suslin, and reviving the name “Etudes.” They are studies in sound production as well as physical production. I have chosen to play four of them, interspersed throughout the recital (perhaps I should suggest they be renamed Interludes!) with two incredible dancers, Paula Modafferi and Chloe Gonzales, to further the pieces interaction with bodies.

***Folia* for double bass and electronics, Kaija Saariaho (1994)**

This piece was an incredible undertaking for me. The types of sounds and the journey from one sound to another are not simple to interpret. This is a staple of Kaija Saariaho’s music. Her music around this time period takes tone color as its main parameter. *Folia* can be played with or without electronics. The effects enhance the tone of the bass in a way that sounds and feels organic. Some electroacoustic works juxtapose acoustic sound with electronic sound, but in this work, they function as one instrument.

Alex Ross has praised Saariaho’s music, mentioning her interest in Spectralism — known for composers such as Grisey and Mureil — stating that Saariaho’s “work, like theirs, moves between extremes of pure tone and noise, often finding a cryptic beauty in the middle zone.”²⁵ That is absolutely true in *Folia*. Saariaho’s stay at IRCAM certainly had a powerful impact on her compositions. By the time she wrote this piece, she was also infusing melodic material into her tone colors. Risto Nieminen has stated that:

²² Michael Kurtz, *Sofia Gubaidulina: A Biography*, translation by Christoph K. Lohmann (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 1.

²³ Michael Berry, “The Importance of Bodily Gesture in Sofia Gubaidulina’s Music for Low Strings,” *Music Theory Online* 15, no. 5 (October 2009), 1.

²⁴ Victor Suslin, liner notes to Sofia Gubaidulina/Victor Suslin, *The Art of Vladimir Tonkha*, Megadisc MDC 7819, 2001.

²⁵ Alex Ross, “The Oceanic Music of Kaija Saariaho,” *New Yorker* (October 31, 2016), <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/10/31/the-oceanic-music-of-kaija-saariaho> (accessed April 10, 2017).

Folia was written soon after *Graal théâtre*, which is evident in the virtuoso string writing. Saariaho originally intended to rescore her cello work *Petals* for double bass, but she abandoned this idea because of technical differences between the instruments. In writing *Folia*, Saariaho worked from the same basic approach as in *Petals*, but *Folia* already belongs to a new period, with textures closely related to those of *Graal théâtre*.²⁶

The piece was premiered by John-Pierre Robert in Lyon on March 23, 1995.

Boundaries, Betsy Soukup (2017)

Dr. Betsy Soukup is essentially my idol and my spirit guide. Our friendship is one of empowerment, trust, and mutual challenge and support. We decided she would write this piece after a conversation we had about composition and the limits imposed by traditional scores. While this is her piece, she collaborated with me on much of the development, allowing us room to explore and break free of the constraints of traditional composer-performer dynamics. I am thrilled to play her music with her, exploring physical and metaphorical “boundaries” that are distinctly of and by, though not limited to, women.

From the composer:

“Boundaries” is an exploration of give and take, tension and release, stillness and chaos, consonance and dissonance, togetherness and separateness. It was composed during a time of careful observation and examination of the grey areas between self and other and how we navigate those spaces. Megan and her willingness to explore, listen, and play were essential to the creative process of writing this piece.

Maknongan, Giacinto Scelsi (1976)

Both the music and the compositional methods of Giacinto Scelsi are unique and the subject of much debate. Many of his, particularly later (post-12-tone music-caused mental breakdown), works center around one or two pitches and create contrast with mostly timbral and some microtonal changes. Scelsi believed he was a vessel for music that already existed, that his music was not creative so much as “immanent.”²⁷ This is a main tenet of his philosophy of composition. His typical method, the cause of the controversy, was to improvise on the ondioline or piano, record his improvisations, and have an assistant transcribe them. Additionally, if it were a solo work for an instrument he did not play, he would work closely with the performer, allowing them significant input, and helping them to shape his vision for the piece.

As many performers who have worked with him have claimed, much of Scelsi’s intention, specifically in his solo pieces, has not been and cannot be translated to a score. The basis for analysis in William Colangelo’s dissertation is “the relationship between composer and

²⁶ Risto Nieminen, “Kaija Saariaho, *Folia*,” IRCAM (website) 1996, <http://brahms.ircam.fr/works/work/20024>.

²⁷ Christopher Fox and David Osmond-Smith, “Scelsi, Giacinto” (rev. January 31, 2002), *Grove Music Online*. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/24720> (accessed December 9, 2014).

performer in Scelsi's music, with the score as one of several sources.”²⁸ Scelsi preferred to develop his music sonically, through improvisation, rather than as a writing process. He wanted the music to come from somewhere unconscious, to free himself from thought. Naturally from this, he would work with certain performers, specifically on instruments he did not play, allowing them to improvise and develop the music in collaboration with him. Many credit his interest in Eastern philosophy with this practice. This collaborative practice could be considered a feminine style of artistic creation.

Maknongan is one of the gods of the Ifugao province of the Philippines.²⁹ Perhaps Scelsi was attempting to evoke connotations with the “East” (as he would have described it), but there doesn’t seem to be any evidence of further meaning in this title. *Maknongan* (1976) is a work “pour un instrument grave...ou voix de basse” (“for a low instrument...or bass voice”), leaving the instrumentation ambiguous. This “open instrumentation” has allowed for many recordings, according to Sharon Kanach.³⁰ The piece is centered around three main pitch classes, G, G sharp/A flat, and A. It also contains B flat, B, C, as well as G quarter-tone sharp, but only very briefly. It moves up to the higher octave on G and A, so those pitch classes are considered to be the most important.³¹ As the pitch content is limited, the contrasts, like much of Scelsi’s work, are made mostly through dynamics and the timbral indications, *chiaro* (clear) and *cupo* (dark). The result is something like an agitated yet mesmerizing drone with motion.

Léandre's performance practice of *Maknongan* stems from her close work with Giacinto Scelsi himself. I have modeled my performance after Léandre’s approach, which is decidedly from a woman.

***Artemis in the Oak Grove* for double bass and piano, Evan Premo (2013)**

I am performing this piece as a tribute to my wonderful teacher, Dr. Diana Gannett. It was written for her by her former student, Evan Premo, who is a bassist and composer as well as one of the founders and artistic directors of Scrag Mountain Music in Vermont. Although the piece was not written by a woman, some of the themes are in line with the idea of one’s ownership over her own body. There are varied accounts of the story of Artemis and Acteon (a hunter), but in one, as the two are both in the woods hunting, Acteon comes upon Artemis bathing nude. In some versions of the story he dares to look at her, while in others he goes as far as attempted rape. She then, refusing to be made into an object of sexual desire or violence, turns Acteon into

²⁸ William Colangelo, “The Composer-Performer Paradigm in Giacinto Scelsi’s Solo Works” (PhD Diss., New York University, 1996): 25-26. <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/dissertations/docview/304256382/abstract/8F79D88013FB41F5PQ/1?accountid=14667>, 26-27.

²⁹ Susan Laverne Fancher, “The Saxophone in the Music of Giacinto Scelsi (1905-1988)” (D.M.A. Diss., Northwestern University, 2002): 95. <http://search.proquest.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/dissertations/docview/305580934/abstract/A72EC21E39DA477FPQ/1?accountid=14667> (accessed December 9, 2014).

³⁰ Sharon Kanach, Liner Notes, *Giacinto Scelsi: The Works for the Double Bass*, Robert Black, double bass, Mode Records, 2008, Streaming Audio. <http://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/746371> (accessed December 9, 2014).

³¹ Fancher, 100.

a stag and he is eaten by his own hunting dogs who do not recognize him.³² She was known for her vengeance as well as her compassion, particularly for animals and children. Artemis's Roman counterpart is Diana. You will hear some of her arrow shots in this piece!

³² "Artemis," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (updated October 22, 2007), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Artemis-Greek-goddess>.

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RECITAL 3 POEMS

Poetry for *To Own a Body*: Third Dissertation Recital
Megan McDevitt, double bass
April 21, 2017

I am afraid to Own a Body

Emily Dickinson

(Read by Megan McDevitt)

I am afraid to own a Body —
I am afraid to own a Soul —
Profound — precarious Property —
Possession, not optional —

Double Estate — entailed at pleasure
Upon an unsuspecting Heir —
Duke in a moment of Deathlessness
And God, for a Frontier.

the sea has grown small inside us

Steffi Drewes

(Read by Megan McDevitt)

steady collapse instead of conundrum. where is the arrow when you really need it?

this keyboard is a hoax, as in a deliberate body double dons an elaborate maze and reckless chatter.

she is thinking it through. eating her way to the outer edge of.

today summer is a scaffolding, an inseam ripe for the plucking. you can follow any line but it will

only lead you so far. forget the southern hemisphere.

think avalanche. think short-sighted approval.

no matter that she has never fired a real gun and lacks 20/20 vision.

still could easily take to the streets in charades, string a set of lantern-halos and salivate on pop

rocks. could craft a secret handshake that can only be achieved at certain radio frequencies.

replace the leaky pipe with a pencil. say everything five times fast. this is yet another schoolyard
trick for
healing.

until the hair is tied in knots. until the axels become axioms.

we cradle the feeling of friction in capillaries, magnified, then record it.

others wait for the sound of running water. open-mouthed and optimistic.

we have learned and we are learning: the source of some rivers is bedrock, the choice of some
pirates, bone.

Instructions for the Interviewer

Tarfia Faizullah

(Read by the poet herself)

Once, she will say, I didn't
know there was a hollow inside

me until he pushed himself
into it. Once, you learned

that inside you was not hollow
but seam: color of the rim of the river

tonguing the long dark shore
of stone: reflection of yourself

an endless ripple in corrugated
metal: width of the silver bangle

circling now her thin, dark arm.
Take the tea she offers. Once,

she will say, I was young,
like you. Once, you wanted

anyone to fill you with blue

noise. Once, you didn't know your
own body's worth. Put the porcelain
cup down. Let it slide into
the saucer's waiting hollow.

Spoken Word Poems (text not included):

“Transplant,” Chrysanthemum Tran (see references)

“Pocket-Sized Feminism,” Blythe Baird (see references)

Be Nobody’s Darling

Alice Walker

(Read by the poet herself)

Be nobody's darling;
Be an outcast.
Take the contradictions
Of your life
And wrap around
You like a shawl,
To parry stones
To keep you warm.
Watch the people succumb
To madness
With ample cheer;
Let them look askance at you
And you askance reply.
Be an outcast;
Be pleased to walk alone
(Uncool)
Or line the crowded
River beds
With other impetuous
Fools.

Make a merry gathering
On the bank
Where thousands perished
For brave hurt words
They said.

But be nobody's darling;
Be an outcast.
Qualified to live
Among your dead.

PAIN FOR A DAUGHTER

Anne Sexton

(Read by the poet herself)

Blind with love, my daughter
has cried nightly for horses,
those long-necked marchers and churners
that she has mastered, any and all,
reigning them in like a circus hand --
the excitable muscles and the ripe neck;
tending this summer, a pony and a foal.
She who is too squeamish to pull
a thorn from the dog's paw,
watched her pony blossom with distemper,
the underside of the jaw swelling
like an enormous grape.
Gritting her teeth with love,
she drained the boil and scoured it
with hydrogen peroxide until pus
ran like milk on the barn floor
Blind with loss all winter,
in dungarees, a ski jacket and a hard hat,
she visits the neighbors' stable,
our acreage not zoned for barns;
they who own the flaming horses
and the swan-whipped thoroughbred
that she tugs at and cajoles,
thinking it will burn like a furnace
under her small-hipped English seat.

Blind with pain she limps home
the thoroughbred has stood on her foot.
He rested there like a building.
He grew into her foot until they were one.
The marks of the horseshoe printed
into her flesh, the tips of her toes
ripped off like pieces of leather,
three toenails swirled like shells
and left to float in blood in her riding boot.

Blind with fear, she sits on the toilet,
her foot balanced over the washbasin,
her father, hydrogen peroxide in hand,

performing the rites of the cleansing.
She bites on a towel, sucked in breath,
sucked in and arched against the pain,
her eyes glancing off me where
I stand at the door, eyes locked
on the ceiling, eyes of a stranger,
and then she cries...
Oh my God, help me!
Where a child would have cried Mama!
Where a child would have believed Mama!
she bit the towel and called on God
and I saw her life stretch out...
I saw her torn in childbirth,
and I saw her, at that moment,
in her own death and I knew that she
knew.

Lady Lazarus

Sylvia Plath

(Read by the poet herself)

I have done it again.
One year in every ten
I manage it——

A sort of walking miracle, my skin
Bright as a Nazi lampshade,
My right foot

A paperweight,
My face a featureless, fine
Jew linen.

Peel off the napkin
O my enemy.
Do I terrify?——

The nose, the eye pits, the full set of teeth?
The sour breath
Will vanish in a day.

Soon, soon the flesh

The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
I am only thirty.
And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.
What a trash
To annihilate each decade.

What a million filaments.
The peanut-crunching crowd
Shoves in to see

Them unwrap me hand and foot——
The big strip tease.
Gentlemen, ladies

These are my hands
My knees.
I may be skin and bone,

Nevertheless, I am the same, identical woman.
The first time it happened I was ten.
It was an accident.

The second time I meant
To last it out and not come back at all.
I rocked shut

As a seashell.
They had to call and call
And pick the worms off me like sticky pearls.

Dying
Is an art, like everything else.
I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.
I do it so it feels real.
I guess you could say I've a call.

It's easy enough to do it in a cell.
It's easy enough to do it and stay put.
It's the theatrical

Comeback in broad day
To the same place, the same face, the same brute
Amused shout:

'A miracle!'
That knocks me out.
There is a charge

For the eyeing of my scars, there is a charge
For the hearing of my heart——
It really goes.

And there is a charge, a very large charge
For a word or a touch
Or a bit of blood

Or a piece of my hair or my clothes.
So, so, Herr Doktor.
So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,
I am your valuable,
The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.
I turn and burn.
Do not think I underestimate your great concern.

Ash, ash——
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there——

A cake of soap,
A wedding ring,
A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

Self-Portrait as Artemis
Tarfia Faizullah
(Read by Megan McDevitt)

It wasn't long before I rose
into the silk of my night-rob

and swilled the stars
and the beetles

back into sweetness—even my fingernails
carry my likeness, and I smudge

the marrow of myself
into light. I whisper street-

car, ardor, midnight
into the ears of the soldier

so he will forget everything
but the eyes of the night nurse

whose hair shines beneath
the prow of her white cap.

In the end, it is me
he shipwrecks. O arrow.

My arms knot as I pluck
the lone string tauter.

O crossbow. I kneel. He oozes,
and the grasses and red wasp

knock him back from my sight.
The night braids my hair.

I do not dream. I do not glow.

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